DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 767 EA 021 177

AUTHOR Norrving, Bengt; Sannerstedt, Anders
TITLE Effects of Decentralisation in the School Sector.
INSTITUTION National Swedish Board of Education, Stockholm.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT School Research Newsletter; n3 Apr 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Curriculum; *Decentralization; *Educational Administration; *Educational Change; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Management Development; *Resource Allocation; *School Organization; Staff Development; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Sweden

ABSTRACT

In 1984, the Swedish National Board of Education inaugurated a major research program on decentralized school administration. The research undertaken at the University of Lund focused upon regional and local school administration: county education committee, local education authority, local education office, and head teachers. Results are summarized under three main ideas: (1) inter-municipal variations become apparent at an early stage, tend to diminish gradually, but not to disappear; (2) decentralization in the school sector has been accompanied by heavy underlining of the overriding objectives, by changes in the indirect control of school organization and resource availability and, eventually, by changes in personnel training as well; (3) decentralization reform and management changes in regard to curriculum, resources, organization, and teacher education are not an end in themselves, but a means to achieve positive effects on school activities. (SI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 313767

APRIL 1989 FIELD-TOPIC 1989:3
Decentralisation

Concluded project: EFFECTS OF DECENTRALISATION IN THE SCHOOL SECTOR

In the 1984 the NBE inaugurated a major research programme on a decentralised school administration. Research allocations were made to several university departments of political science throughout the country.
The research programme undertaken by the Lund Department has focused on regional and local school administration - county education comittee, local education authority, local education office and head teachers. An immense quantity of findings has been presented in the five essays contained by our recently published book, Makten över den decentraliserade skolan (Studentlitteratur 1988).

In this issue of the Newsletter, we propose to summarise our results for the basic level of school under three main heads.

PROJECT COMPLETED AT:
Department of Political Science
University of Lund
Box 5131
S-220 05 LUND

PROJECT LEADERS:
Bengt Norrving
Anders Sannerstedt

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Inger Wärklund
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 021 177

NEWSLETTER 1983 - 1988

1983:1 Evaluation of Courses of Study at Upper Secondary School (UTGY)
1983:2 The Research Programme of The National Swedish Board of Education
1983:3 Science Subjects - An Evaluation of Student Achivement and Attitudes in International Perspective (IEA Science II)
1983:4 Evaluation through follow-up of students (UGU)
1983:5 Analysis of teacher-directed experimentation

1984:1 Children with early perceptual funcional disturbances. A follow-up during school years
1984:2 The SIAu Project: Project description
1984:3 Transition from compulsory and upper secondary school to further education or employment - the GUARANTEE project
1984:4 Vertical integration at junior and intermediate levels
1984:5 Learning to read
1984:6 Family support and development - a longitudinal, ecological study of families with children of fre-school and junior-level age (the FASI-Project)
1984:7 Study assistance and adult study assistance - utilisation and effects
1984:8 UTRES - Evaluation of resource utilisation in upper secondary schools
1984:9 MEDIA PANEL

1985:1 Creativity and communication: music and art education - The KROK-project
1985:2 Childrens participation at junior level
1985:3 Programme for recurrent educational situation reports: school description models
1985:4 Discovery learning and cognitive development - the UKU-project
1985:5 Man in a changing society - MIS
1985:6 Systematic evaluation of the "forest in schools" project
1985:7 Evaluation of experimental concentration of studies in upper secondary school
1985:8 Pupils' working environment at school in use (EMILIA)
1985:9 Immigrant pupils at the senior level of compulsory school and in the upper secondary school

1986:1 Education - Society: Curricular theory
1986:2 IEA Written composition study
1986:3 UTRES - Evaluation of resource utilisation in upper secondary school
1986:4 Technology and science in school and society: Education, training, subsequent training
1986:5 Historical image and historical awareness
1986:6 Political and citizenship education in Swedish schools in the 20th century (the role and concept formation of social subjects)
1986:7 Feasibility of joint studies in adult education
1986:8 Studies of the innovation process in compulsory school
1986:9 Girls in science and technology
1986:10 Evaluation trough pupil follow-up - the UGU project

1987:1 Young people and peace - prerequisites for peaceoriented istruction
1987:2 Functional opportunities of the school administration in municipalities with local agencies and free municipality experiments
1987:3 Steering strategies in a decentralised decitionmaking system
1987:4 The outward efficiency of schools
1987:5 Swedish in upper secondary school - two worlds?

1988:1 META STUDIES
1988:2 Pupils' frames of reference and the content of teaching
1988:3 Follow-up of the in-service training programme "An upper secondary school for all"
1988:4 A Cognitive Taxonomy for Mathematics Teachin
1988:5 Psychological Mechanisms in Children with deficient empathy and sympathy
1989:1 Decentralisation in School Administration
1989-2 Alternative Course in Mathematics

Inter-municipal variations

1. When new activities are introduced in a decentralised system, considerable variations become apparent at an early stage. These variations tend gradually to diminish, but not to disappear. There are two reasons for them.

Firstly, changes are introduced at different speeds. Some municipalities are pioneers, others lag behind. Some municipalities have actors amenable to change, while in others there are powerful conservative forces at work. Willingness to abandon established routines in order to try something new is extremely variable. Often it is the big municipalities which introduce changes first.

Secondly, at an early stage there may be a desire for experimentation and uncertainty as to what, objectively speaking, is the best solution, with the result that different alternatives are tested in different quarters. When the previous routines are departed from and an attempt made to design new ones, then, initially, different actors will look for their solutions in different directions. This applies to all policy fields, and schools are no exception to the rule.

Where schools are concerned, certain municipalities soon began distributing the back-up resource in response to needs, working units were organised in very different ways, the consultation procedure was variously organised and work on local working plans was conducted with varying width and with varying levels of ambition.

This being so, why, subsequently, does an equalisation come about? Firstly, the previous experimentation will be evaluated. Failures will be rectified. Successful innovations will be disseminated to other municipalities, through news media, conferences and professions.

Secondly, there are powerful pro-equalisation forces at work in Swedish society. Equality and justice are two universally accepted watchwords. The objective of equivalent education for all is constantly re-affirmed in the debate on education. A municipality will compare itself with other municipalities, and ranks will be dressed. Inter-municipal associations,

school administrators, politicians and teachers - all of them make comparisons, all of them absorb innovations, adjust their level of aspiration, all of them demand justice. The result is a process leading to a slow equalisation.

Thirdly, the adverse condition of local government finances and constant demands for spending cuts have made municipalities less disposed to invest in peripheral activities which they have to finance themselves out of taxation revenue.

We also believe that, if at some future date Sweden should abandon the system of a centrally defined curriculum for compulsory school and move closer to the Danish model, developments here would describe a similar pattern. In an initial stage, presumably, we would acquire municipal curricula fairly similar to the existing Lgr 80, as time went on there would be increasing divergences, and then there would be a gradual equalisation, albeit a slow one and by no means all-embracing.

Reforms take time

2. Decentralisation in the school sector has been accompanied, as usual, by heavy underlining of the overriding objectives, by changes in the indirect control of school organisation and resource availability, and eventually in personnel training as well. This new, indirect form of control is being complied with at municipal level, but - and this is our second main point - the process takes time. The more exact the steering mechanism and the greater the opportunities of control, the faster the steering mechanism will be complied with. And conversely, when steering is vague and control is weak, it will be a long time before the intentions underlying the policy decision are translated into practice - if indeed they ever are. Early evaluation, admittedly, can serve as a warning bell here, but the final verdict should be postponed for many years. This is a constant theme of implementation literature.

Where schools are concerned we can see this with regard to the allocation of the back-up resource and in the construction of viable working units. Not until several years have passed did a substantial portion of the back-up resource come to be distributed in the majority of municipalities with

reference to actual needs. And working units in compulsory school are still at the start-up stage.

Why is this? Why does it take such a time for the desired effects to be achieved with regard to organisation, process and resource allocation? In the various essays in "Makten över den decentraliserade skolan" we have pointed to a number of contributory factors:

(a) In a working organisation, changes are tested step by step, and often with short steps at that. Swedish schools are not interested in making drastic changes and performing break-neck experiments. But, insofar as the new regulations confer greater degrees of liberty, there takes place, locally, a successive probing of the opportunities which this newfound liberty has to offer. One can speak here in terms of a long-drawn-out learning process. Often, however, developments can only move in one direction. For example, once the practice of distributing the back-up resource with reference to needs has been introduced, it becomes hard to revert to the proportional doling out of funds which used to be the regular practice.

(b) With all respect to decentralisation, school organisation has not been fundamentally transformed, and so there are powerful forces running contrary to rapid change. Breaking up established routines and established patterns of influence takes time and is difficult to accomplish. Consultative procedures, e.g. school conferences, have also failed in this respect. When pupils and parents suddenly have to penetrate matters for which teachers and pupils have long been responsible, it is not to be wondered at that patterns of influence remain unaltered.

(c) An organisation cannot cope with too many changes at once. Often new questions arise which, at local level, are felt to be more important, which demand a solution and which pre-empt the attention, energies and creativity of the key actors. Dwindling pupil rolls and the attendant problems of school closures and teacher redundancies are questions of this kind. They were not much in evidence when the decentralisation reform was drawn up and decided on, but they have become more and more dominant during the implementation period.

Intractability of the teaching profession

3. Let us now turn to the third of our main points. Decentralisation reforms and all changes of management with regard to curriculum, resources, organisation and teacher education, of course, are not an end in themselves. They are all to be regarded as means to an end, their ultimate purpose being for us to achieve positive effects on school activities, the activities conducted in the encounter between teachers (and other employees) on the one hand and the pupils on the other. The ultimate aim of these things is for us to achieve what the catch-phrase refers to as "a good school for everybody".

Within the Lund programme we have not directly studied what goes on in the teaching situation - this aspect is taken care of by researchers in other disciplines - but we have several indications of the different reforms not having made much impression on teaching.

Variations with regard to resource allocation, for example, are unconnected with the inputs organised for pupils with difficulties. Working units, local working plans and consultation procedures may come and go, but it is still the individual teacher who does most to influence both teaching and inputs of other kinds from the pupils.

Why is this? It is connected with what we have already observed: it is here, in teaching, that steering is vaguest and it is here that control is weakest. This is where politicians have most difficulty in steering things. The elected representatives can presumably control resource flows, organisational design, administrative processes and changes in teacher education, but they have greater difficulty in controlling local bureaucrats who work professionally with people. Professions will not be ruled by amateurs, even if we use the word "amateur" in its original sense of loving practitioner. And work with people, especially a job in which individual allowances should be made, is hard to control.

We conclude that power - power over the decentralised school system - may belong to politicians and administrators in matters relating to the curriculum and the control of organisation, resources, teacher education and appointments, even though it takes time for the exercise of power to

produce results. But as regards the content of activities, as regards teaching and working methods, power over the decentralised school system (just as with the centralised system) is primarily vested in the local bureaucrats - in the teachers.

We have pointed out that the steering instruments then available to the elected representatives are of the more informal kind, viz opinion formation, persuasion and quasi-negotiation. There is no longer any question of rule and obedience. Instead we have an encounter between mutually dependent equals. We are concerned here with opinion formation through many channels, with key actors at intermediate level within the organisation occupying a strategically important position as agents of change. It is only in the long run that one can expect this persuasive opinion formation to produce effects. And, moreover, it is a widely attested fact that these methods produce better results if one party - the transmitter, the elected representative - is viewed in a positive light by the other party - the receiver, the teacher. This is not the case in the school sector, not at present. As we see it, trying to recover that trust is an important task for politicians, not least if they wish to succeed in their steering attempts.

Three out of ten teachers have very little confidence or none at all in the municipal education authority. This is apparent from a report published by the NBE following a SIFO survey. And yet considerable decision-making powers have been invested in these local education authorities and quite considerable hopes have been pinned on them. The Lund Project is not concerned with teachers' attitudes to political parties, but our research reports contain a certain amount of data which can supplement and explain teachers' image of school politicians as portrayed in the NBE report. Part of the explanation for the teachers' opinion, then, is to be found in the reform of the school administration.

The teaching profession

We will continue our account of the research project by considering the importance of the teaching profession as a factor influencing the workings of the school organisation and the opportunities and difficulties associated with changes in organisation and activities. On this basis we

propose to present our main findings from studies at municipal education authority and county education committee levels. We raise questions relating to school politicians, changes in the working methods of the municipal school organisation, the implementation of labour law in the school sector and the role of the county education committee in relations between central, national level and municipal level... These are all questions relating to power over schools. What do these things imply concerning the prospects of exerting power over schools? What are the capabilities and wishes of elected representatives in these respects? And the teaching profession? Where all these questions are concerned, we maintain that the teaching profession plays an important role, at the same time as the problems thus stated extend far beyond the confines of the school sector.

First a few words about professions. There is quite an extensive body of literature on this subject, and it is argued that all professions present the following characteristic features: (1) Systematic theoretical education for the activities concerned, (2) authority, (3) sanction from the community, (4) ethical rules, and (5) a specific culture. It is of course open to discussion how far we have a fully developed profession in the school sector. Some of the above stated requirements are definitely met, but we sometimes come across discussions indicating a bid for greater professionalisation on the part of teachers, suggesting that they do not feel themselves to have achieved the status of a separate, recognised profession. We have to contrast this with the image of the street bureaucrat's activities in direct contact with his clients, the perceived lack of resources, stress and disciplinary problems. Whom does the street bureaucrat wish to make responsible for these last mentioned conditions and for the inability of the profession to develop?

It follows from the characteristics of a profession that it enjoys a considerable amount of autonomy. Questions with a central bearing on the activities conducted by the profession are decided by the profession itself. It should be made clear at this point that we also take the profession to include persons with administrative decision-making powers, e.g. head teachers, the personnel of county education committees and the central, national school administration. Every decision which the

profession does not make itself or cannot control in some other way is perceived as a risk.

Changes of organisation and decision-making

When a school reform is aimed among other things at transferring decision-making powers from the professional school administration at central and regional levels to the politically appointed local education authority, this in itself can come as a challenge to the profession. And there are further complications associated with the reform.

The decision-making of the professional organisation is characterised by a capacity for problem-solving. The decision-making of the political organisation, by contrast, is characterised by a capacity for conflict-resolving. After the reform, then, school questions will come to be processed in a different environment - an environment with which the profession is not familiar, even if there is no lack of teachers in our local education authorities. Here, of course, we have further seeds of tension. A reply made by a union representative in the school sector during an interview will serve to epitomise the tensions set up by the decentralisation: "The nasty thing about decentralisation is that decisions get to be made by people who are not qualified to make them. The LEA looks on itself as the authority to which decision-making has been decentralised". Another illuminating remark: "Things were better in the old days, with everybody knocking Stockholm. Now everyone's knocking everyone else instead".

There is another aspect to the problem of local school administration, namely the possibilities enjoyed by school politicians of coping with and utilising the decision-making powers given to them by the school reform. We have asked ourselves if this was the reform which passed by the school politicians. What chance does a local education authority, meeting once every month, have of penetrating and deciding different questions? A lot of the business in this sector has been delegated by the local education authority to officials in a joint school administration and to school management districts. The extent of delegation, however, varies with the size of the municipality.

One thing the school reform did not change, and that was the formal structure of municipal committees. Basically, the political organisation is the same size in both the smallest and the largest municipalities, and there is a physical limit to the volume of work an organisation can deal with. Through the delegation of powers, many school questions have been fielded back into the profession. With a few exceptions, it is hard to point to any major organisational consequences of the school reform. A reform of this kind, however, constitutes a catalyst for organisational changes which may be prompted by other considerations.

Our results show that politicians have tried to get certain questions off the LEA agenda and delegate them to decision-makers in the professional sphere. Apart from a number of routine administrative matters, this has applied to questions involving individual pupils and suchlike matters-questions on which there are no natural party-political standpoints. Nevertheless, there are a number of matters on which political agencies venture into territory formerly reserved for the professional organisation. Goal documents for schools are one such example. Several municipal representatives have also stated that local education authorities have aimed to establish a principle by settling a number of cases and then delegating to officials.

The school reform: one of several reforms in the municipalities

It should be noted that a reform which attracts a good deal of interest and commitment over a long period among "the school community" and is regarded by them as vitally important to the whole range of their activities, does not necessarily rank equally high outside the school sector. The school reform was one of several reforms by which Sweden's municipalities came to be affected more or less simultaneously.

The elected municipal politicians have to allocate resources between a variety of fields. Schools are not necessarily sacred to them, even though we have seen examples of several municipalities trying to protect schools from national spending cuts by making up the shortfall out of municipal funds.

If a profession feels that schools are having to compete with other municipal activities for resources and that schools may even suffer spending cuts, this is yet another source of irritation and suspicion.

Labour law in the school sector

The entire discussion of professionalism in the school sector has a central bearing on labour law. Several of our viewpoints come from research we have done in this field, but we would particularly emphasise the routine character which co-determination talks have come to assume. Few people regard them as a problem; participation by trade union organisations is part and parcel of the modern organisation. Another finding should be specially pointed out, namely the difficulties, in activity of a professional nature, involved in segregating questions relating to the goals, focus, scope and quality of activities from those which can be said to concern the employer-employee relationship and thus to be amenable to negotiation.

The municipal school politicians

Our studies have shown that elected representatives in local education authorities do not differ conspicuously from the members of other municipal committees. They usually remain faithful to their sector before, in a few cases, the time comes to serve on the municipal executive board. In this respect the local education authority resembles the social welfare committee. A municipal political career is usually quite short. When the newly elected local education authorities gathered for their first meeting in January this year, few of their members had had any experience of LEA work prior to the school reform. Insofar as retrospects are needed, it is instead the officials (the chief education officers) who provide them. Lack of experience, however, should not be taken to imply that school politicians are a second eleven in municipal politics.

The changing role of the county education committees

What has already been said concerning the profession in schools is no less applicable to the role of the county education committees and its transformation as a result of the school reform. Mention should also be

made of the different conceptions entertained by the NBE, the county education committees and municipalities, following the reform, of the main thrust of activities. The municipalities, the county education committees are above all distributors of national funding. The NBE looks on its regional organisation as the field organisation of the national school administration. The county education committees look on themselves as an intermediary between State and municipality.

The NBE looks on active supervision as the main operational priority of the county education committees. The latter feel that this should be the case, but in fact they report that matters of resource allocation take pride of place. The municipalities have the same view as the county education committees on the subject of de facto conditions, i.e. that the county education committees concentrate mainly on questions concerning State grants. These varying opinions concerning the main thrust of activities point to a conflicting and competitive view of the functions of county education committees.

Conclusion

Our research projects take as their starting point a decentralisation perspective, the transfer of decision-making powers from superior to inferior agencies. This indeed was the way in which the NBE formulated its research programme. Reality, however, has not revealed any unambiguous development in this direction. There have been and still are efforts in a centralistic direction. Steering signals have been emitted in contrary directions. For example, it has been intimated from leading political quarters that the local education authorities ought not to follow a political line of their own but should realise the school policy decided on centrally. The strong professional influences already referred to, coupled with a number of other factors, are causing change in the school sector to proceed slowly but in the intended direction.

As our research has shown, not much has happened by reason of the school reform. A lot of things today are proceeding along the same lines as before. Many people may interpret this absence of sweeping changes as powerlessness. We beg to differ. If the big changes have not yet occurred, or if perhaps they may never occur at all, this is not power-

lessness but should instead by looked on as a strong manifestation of the force of habit. This is the source from which a good deal of power over the decentralised school system emanates.

SCHOOL RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

School Research Newsletter contains reviews of curent and terminated research within the field of education.

School Research Newsletter is published and distributed in an edition of 600 issues ten times per year. The Newsletter is obtained free of charge.

Published by Swedish National Board of Education,
Department for Coordination and Planning.
S-106 42 Stockholm. Telephone +46 8 783 20 00
Responsible Editor: Inger Marklund. Editor: Cecilia Dahlberg
ISSN 0345 5343